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ABSTRACT

School journals were examined to view the variety of roles shown for each sex and the view given of the places of men and women in the world. Journals issued in each of four years were studied, with 1977 and 1978 representing recent years, 1975 chosen since it was International Women's Year, and 1969. All journals were studied for the number of times each sex was referred to in the text or shown in the illustrations, for the number of references to famous men and women, and for any incidences of sexism in the language used. It was concluded that there is a majority of males mentioned in school journals. Some movement toward equality between 1969 and 1978 was noted. It was felt the types of roles, activities, and character traits assigned to each sex contributes to a picture of life where males engage in a wider range of more exciting and interesting roles than do females. It is noted that if equality of opportunity is accepted as a goal, it must be ensured that books provided for school children reflect this. (MP)

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SEX-ROLE STEREOTYPING

IN SCHOOL JOURNALS

MARCH 1980

SEX-ROLE STEREOTYPING IN SCHOOL JOURNALS

1 Introduction

It seems probable that children's attitudes towards themselves and their sex are influenced by the books they read, especially those provided by the school which may seem to be officially approved. A review of the relevant literature showed that many studies had found evidence of sex-role stereotyping in school textbooks.

As part of a continuing investigation into the incidence of sex-role stereotyping in school textbooks it was decided to examine school journals over the last ten years. School journals were chosen as an example of books widely available in primary schools.

The general focus of this study was on the variety of roles shown for each sex and the view given of the places of men and women in the world.

2 Methodology

It was decided to study the journals issued in each of four years - 1977 and 1978 as two recent years, 1975 as it was International Women's Year and there might have been expected to be references to this, and 1969 to allow a comparison over a ten year period.

Journals are written in four parts (for different ages) and the number of issues for each part varies from three to five. For each year, Number One of each Part was analysed in detail to give information on character traits and the number and type of activities and occupations assigned to each sex.

All journals were examined to record the number of times each sex was referred to in the text, or shown in the illustrations, the number of references to famous men and women and any incidences of sexism in the language used.

To check agreement on ratings of character traits and occupations and activities, two raters examined six journals and then discussed their assessments until they had reached agreement. When two further raters began taking part, their assessments were checked by one of the first two raters. In general, agreement on activities and occupations was good but character traits were more difficult to assess. For this reason, less weight should be placed on the findings for the latter.

3 Results

3.1 Number of Characters

The number of characters (people, animals) in the 1969, 1975, 1977 and 1978 School Journals was counted. Groups of characters which had no specific number eg. children, brothers have been counted as two throughout.

The characters were divided into Child male and female and Adult male and female in the following categories: Major, Secondary and Background characters. The statistics for Animal male and female and Neutral characters cover all categories.

Table 1 : Major Characters

		1969		1975		1977		1978	
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Child	Male	48	70	30	64	37	59	29	45
	Female	21	30	17	36	26	41	35	55
Adult	Male	31	89	54	72	54	72	31	55
	Female	4	11	21	28	21	28	25	45

The above table shows a trend away from male domination of major roles to a ratio which is close to 1:1. Child females and Adult males are slightly in the majority in 1978 which is in contrast to 1969 when the ratio for Child male to Child female was around 2:1 and Adult male to Adult female was around 8:1.

Table 2 : Secondary Characters

		1969		1975		1977		1978	
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Child	Male	16	70	36	61	38	54	29	63
	Female	7	30	23	39	33	46	17	37
Adult	Male	50	61	111	60	113	64	109	62
	Female	32	39	73	40	63	36	68	38

The number of males is greater in each year for both child and adult characters. There is however a trend towards a ratio of 1:1 for child characters between 1969 and 1977 but the ratio for 1978 is just under 2:1 males to females which is not much better than the ratio of just over 2:1 males to females recorded for 1969. The ratio for adults remains around 2:1 male to female over the four years.

Table 3 : Background Characters

		1969		1975		1977		1978	
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Child	Male	9	37	21	78	15	42	10	37
	Female	15	63	6	22	21	58	17	63
Adult	Male	45	78	122	73	111	69	76	62
	Female	13	22	45	27	49*	31	47	38

* There were an additional fifty girls learning to paint pots.

The above table shows a greater use of female children than males in the background in every year except 1975 when the ratio is over 3:1 males to females. There was no overall change between 1969 and 1978 in the proportion of male children who were background characters.

The figures for Adults show a trend towards greater equality. In 1969 the ratio of males to females was over 3:1 and in 1978 under 2:1.

Table 4 : Animal and Neutral Characters

		1969		1975		1977		1978	
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Animal	Male	31	76	34	64	38	76	64	76
	Female	10	24	19	36	12	24	20	24
Neutral		41	11.0*	123	16.7*	72	10.2*	64	10.0*

* Percentage of total characters.

This table shows that more animals were attributed with male characteristics and the ratios have been similar throughout the years studied.

Neutral characters have comprised about ten percent of the total characters in three of the four years studied.

Table 5 : Total Child and Adult Characters

	1969		1975		1977		1978	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Total Male Characters	199	68	374	67	368	63	284	58
Total Female Characters	92	32	185	33	213	37	209	42

In summary, the proportion of females appearing as characters in school journals had fluctuated between 1969 and 1978 but shown an overall increase, although they were still a minority (42%) in 1978. Females in 1978 formed a majority of the children who were major or background characters but were a minority of secondary child characters and all adult characters.

3.2 Illustrations

Each journal was examined and the numbers of males and females appearing in each illustration were recorded. Pictures showing large crowds were excluded from the count but these scenes usually contained a majority of males, although some were mixed. The 1975 journals showed four groups where women were a majority but there were none in the other years.

Table 6 : Number and Proportion of Males and Females

	1969		1975		1977		1978	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Males	518	74	680	73	945	69	716	62
Females	182	26	254	27	423	31	438	38
Total	700	100	934	100	1368	100	1154	100

The proportion of females shown in illustrations has increased from 26% in 1969 to 38% in 1978. Although there has been some movement toward equality of numbers of each sex appearing, there was still a majority of males by 1978.

The journals were examined further to discover the image of modern girls and women presented. Illustrations involving period clothes or "dressing up", and those which were unclear, group scenes or showed females in national costumes were excluded from this investigation.

Table 7 : Features Commonly Used in Illustrations of Girls

	1969(%)	1975(%)	1977(%)	1978(%)
Long hair/pony tail, plaits etc.	74	54	36	40
Dresses	34	63	63	58
Ribbons or bows	21	15	18	12
Trousers, shorts	50	17	19	23
Number of girls	68	54	113	142

The proportion of girls pictured as having long hair has decreased between 1969 and 1978 while the proportion wearing dresses has fluctuated. 1969 was an atypical year as far as girl's attire was concerned-one journal had many photographs of a girl wearing shorts and this has distorted the overall impression given by the numbers above. However, girls are still more likely to be shown wearing dresses than wearing trousers.

Table 8 : Features Commonly Used in Illustrations of Women

	1969(%)	1975(%)	1977(%)	1978(%)
Long hair	6	18	8	10
Dresses	83	70	57	57
Trousers	--	8	12	12
Aprons	56	18	17	13
Buns	11	14	19	12
Number of Women	18	50	75	68

Women are also more likely to be shown wearing dresses than wearing trousers. A common image presented is "Mum", wearing a dress, an apron and with her hair in a bun. However, the proportion shown in slacks has increased slightly in the last few years.

3.3 Occupations and Activities

The detailed analysis of four journals for each year allowed a tally of the number and type of occupations and activities described for each sex.

Table 9 : Number and Proportion of Different Occupations and Activities Assigned to Each Group.

	1969		1975		1977		1978	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Adult								
Male	67	76	106	61	99	60	75	52
Female	20	23	56	32	48	29	58	40
Neutral	1	1	13	7	17	10	12	8
	88	100	175	100	164	100	145	100
Child								
Male	36	61	28	51	40	56	30	51
Female	23	39	25	45	29	41	29	49
Neutral	0	0	2	4	2	3	0	0
	59	100	55	100	71	100	59	100
Animal								
Male	0		1		15	68	7	64
Female	0		0		5	23	2	18
Neutral	0		0		2	9	2	18
	0		1		22	100	11	100

Although there has been some fluctuation between 1969 and 1978, there has been an overall increase in the proportion of occupations and activities assigned to females (both adult and child) and a corresponding decrease in the proportion mentioned for males. It was only in 1977 and 1978 that animals were described as having occupations and activities and the majority of these were assigned to male animals. This reflects the relative numbers of male and female animals (see Section 3.1).

By looking more closely at the actual activities and occupations listed a few comments can be made. In each year, adult male occupations covered almost every type of activity from alluvial diamond digging to being a village priest while females were often mentioned in the home context, looking after children and/or the home. Thus female occupations and activities tended to be more limited in variety than those of males.

Occupations and activities assigned to male and female children cover a similar range with perhaps a tendency for males to be more active than females, and for females to have more indoor activities.

Women were shown in some roles more commonly seen as male eg a champion buck jump rider in 1969, mutton birding, gutting sheep and being a town councillor in 1975, building a boat in 1977 and flying aeroplanes, being a technician and a television director in 1978. This was particularly true for the vocational series in 1977 and 1978 which showed women in unusual occupations such as veterinarian, television director and landscape architect. Adult males were also shown in atypical occupations and activities but to a lesser extent. Examples were washing clothes in 1975, cooking breakfast, picking flowers, sewing, and preparing a salad in 1977, and "shopping for spuds" in 1978.

3.4 Famous People

1969 was the only year in which famous people were mentioned to any great extent. This was the year of Cook's bicentenary and there were many articles relating to this which named far more males than females. 1975 was International Women's Year although this was not referred to in any of the journals. In each year, more males than females were mentioned.

Table 10 : Famous People Referred to in Journals

	1969	1975	1977	1978
Males	37	4	6	6
Females	4	-	-	1

3.5 Character Traits

Four journals for each year (one from each age level) were studied in detail to discover the character traits displayed by males and females. Traits were recorded as in the tables below on a positive-negative dichotomy. The designation of traits as positive and negative was for ease of recording and is not based on any scientific scale. The number of times each trait was shown was related to the number of people assessed, to give the percentage of each sex, child and adult with each trait. The number of cases involved in each year were too small to detect any change over time; therefore only the composite data were used. Judgements as to the traits shown were subjective and it was difficult to reach agreement between raters as to when background and secondary characters should be included. For this reason, indications only can be given of the types of characters displayed by males and females.

Table 11 : Positive Character Traits All Years Combined.

	Child		Adult	
	Male(%)	Female(%)	Male(%)	Female(%)
Active	71	63	61	43
Good	0	17	8	2
Strong	18	23	29	22
Kind	10	14	20	19
Intelligent	12	11	22	11
Tender	4	9	11	15
Helping	35	37	27	27
Clean	8	20	2	6
Calm, capable	16	14	22	26
Confident	6	3	6	6
Humble	0	3	3	4
Leading	24	11	26	17
Independent	4	3	3	2
Number of Characters	51	35	139	81

The character traits most commonly assigned to male children were being active, helping and leading while females tended to be described as active, helping and strong (including strong-minded). Boys were more often than girls shown as active, confident and leading and girls were more often shown as good, kind, tender, and clean.

Male adults seemed to be active, strong, helping, leading, intelligent, calm/capable and kind while female adults were active, helping, calm/capable and strong. Men were more likely than women to be active, strong, intelligent and leading while women were more likely to be tender and clean.

Table 12 : Negative Character Traits All Years Combined.

	Child		Adult	
	Male(%)	Female(%)	Male(%)	Female(%)
Passive	12	26	5	19
Naughty, bad	20	23	5	1
Weak	4	14	8	9
Mean	8	3	22	10
Stupid	10	3	7	6
Violent	16	3	26	9
Receiving help	22	17	11	20
Dirty	10	6	6	1
Upset, Emotional	33	43	22	41
Shy	2	9	2	0
Boastful	8	6	6	4
Following	22	26	11	11
Dependent	2	--	--	--
Number of Characters	51	35	139	81

Negative traits most frequently shown by boys were being upset/emotional, receiving help, following and being naughty. Girls were depicted as upset/emotional, following and naughty too but were also passive. Boys were more often than girls shown as mean, stupid, violent, receiving help and dirty while girls were more likely than boys to be portrayed as passive, weak, upset/emotional and shy.

Negative traits most often associated with male adults were being violent, mean and upset/emotional while females were portrayed as upset/emotional, receiving help and passive. Men were more often than women shown as bad, mean, violent, and dirty while women were more often than men passive, receiving help, and upset/emotional.

Most traits were shown by both sexes on at least some occasions. However, looking at the traits more often assigned to one sex than to the other gives a picture of males and females which is stereotyped to a certain extent. Thus, males are more often than females, active, confident, leading, strong, intelligent, mean, stupid, violent, dirty, receiving help and bad, while

females are more often good, kind, tender, clean, passive, receiving help, weak, upset/emotional and shy. In at least one instance males were attributed with contradictory traits eg they were seen as both more intelligent and (in different stories) as more stupid than females. It should be noted that men tended to be angry while women tended to be fearful, worried or crying. Traits also varied with age eg males were more likely than females to receive help as children and less likely as adults. The overall impression seems to be that males have more definite personalities while females tend to be bland.

3.6 Language

Sexism was apparent in the language used in school journals throughout the years studied (1969, 1975, 1978, 1979).

A particular sex (more often male) was assigned to roles which could include both sexes or to inanimate objects which are sexless. For example, the pronouns 'he' and 'she' were used with words which are neutral.

'He' was applied to 20 different occupations or activities eg patient, dentist, doctor, professor, puppet and the chaser in a game of tag, while 'she' was applied to only four, three of which were nuturant roles (teacher, babysitter and district nurse). There was one production secretary as well. Inanimate objects such as ships, boats and planes were referred to as 'she' but although a machine and traction engine were 'she', an engine and a zap machine were 'he'. Attributing the female sex to mobile objects seems to contradict the traditional association of females with passivity.

The majority of animals, insects and birds were given the male sex. Seventy-one different creatures were called 'he' including a caterpillar which is asexual and a goose which lays eggs. Of these, fifteen were referred to on other occasions as female and only seven creatures appeared as female alone.

The lexicon was another area where bias was apparent. People in general were referred to as 'guys', 'men' and 'man'.

Suffixes supply further examples of words which may seem to a child's literal mind to refer to men only eg policeman, handy-man and countryman. Eighteen different examples of male suffixes were found and only one with a female suffix (wardrobe mistress). The impression from the examples given is that many occupations are for men only. With the passing of the Human Rights Commission Act 1977 it is now illegal for jobs to be advertised in this way which may influence this trend in future years.

There were other examples of sexist language such as "Perhaps this needs a man after all", "I thought I had enough to worry about without having a girl to look after" and "it was a real girls trick". The vocational articles tended to refer to men as Mr and women by their first name and surname without a title.

In summary, there were many examples of sexism in the language used in school journals in each of the four years surveyed. There did not seem to be any improvement between 1969 and 1978.

Conclusion

Whatever the method used for comparing numbers of males and females (number of major, secondary and background characters of each sex, number of illustrations of each sex or the number of activities and roles assigned to each sex) it seems that although there has been some movement toward equality between 1969 and 1978 in the numbers of males and females in school journals there is still a majority of males. It is disturbing to note that while Cook's Bicentenary in 1969 led to many articles concerning this, there was no mention of International Women's Year in 1975.

The types of roles and activities and, to a lesser extent, the character traits assigned to each sex contribute to a picture of life where males engage in a wider range of more exciting and interesting roles than do females. Children reading these journals, who are beginning to formulate their own view of the world and perhaps wonder what job they will do in the future, may receive the impression that certain occupations and activities are not open to one sex; sex-role stereotyping may thus affect their aspirations and their choice of careers. The character traits portrayed for each sex may influence the development of these traits. If children decide that only certain traits are appropriate for their sex this may restrict their opportunities in later life and their ability to develop into mentally healthy adults.

If equality of opportunity is accepted as a goal, we must ensure that books provided for school children reflect this.

Research and Statistics Division

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